

Get a Life—Dealing with Domestic Duties

By Dianna Booher

If you happen to be disorganized, your vacuum can suck up your time right along with the dirt. Domestic duties, whether you are an employed parent or a work-at-home parent, need to be organized like any other projects in order to get the most from the time you spend doing them.

Cut the Clutter

If you find yourself surrounded by clutter—and are tempted to keep it indefinitely, ask: If I wanted this someday, would I remember that I have it? Would I know where to find it immediately? Would I want to take the time to find it (clean it up, repair it) for use? Could I find/buy another one with less effort and time?

If you tend to have clutter creep in your living space, try this suggestion: Keep a clutter control corner/cubicle for each room. When visitors arrive, straightening (or hiding) one cluttered corner/box is better than trying to restore the whole room to order.

Do the Laundry Later

A washer and dryer in every home has reduced the scrub and rinse time, but increased the total time we spend doing laundry—sorting, carrying, loading, bleaching, spraying, unloading, folding, putting away.

Can you cut the washing time by taking two or three baths with the same towel? Wearing the same jeans more than once? Before you change clothes, towels, or sheets, remember that laundry involves more than dropping clothes in the washer and hitting the button.

Clean Only What You Need to Clean and When You Need to Clean

- Clean only what you need to clean. Why vacuum the week you KNOW no one but you and your family will set foot inside your house?
- Clean only WHEN you need to clean it. Why mop the entire floor if you have only one splash of tea under the table?
- Just mop or wipe up the tea stain.
- For the huge cleaning projects (like washing windows, cleaning the garage, vacuuming the upholstery and drapes) that need to be done only a few times a year, hire someone by the hour.

- Have all the tools you need (cleaners, rags, brushes, mops) in one bucket/basket/pouch/tray.

Shop Like You Don't Mean It

These guidelines will help you keep shopping cost (time/effort/energy/mileage) to a minimum:

- Shop in stores that are familiar, where you know where to find things. A supermarket "on the way" some place may be quick to enter, but you may spend fifteen minutes searching for the item you need.
- Shop in stores that want your business—where they have ample staff on hand to answer questions, exchange merchandise, and take your money without requiring you to stand in long lines.
- Shop at "off hours." (Don't go to the grocery store around noon on Saturday.)
- Buy in bulk.
- Look at your calendar for the next week/month and notice the "special" items you need—birthday cards, gifts, ingredients for potluck dishes, school lunches.
- Shop online.

Simplify Your Recordkeeping

To consolidate and eliminate recordkeeping, write all your checks from one checking account.

For investment purposes, buy into two or three fund families and keep your money diversified by switching funds within these two or three families. Select solid investments and stay put for the long-haul.

Put all your purchases on one or two major credit cards. Keep the others only to establish a good record and to bail yourself out of real emergencies.

For magazine subscriptions, keep all your receipts and expiration dates in one place.

Invest in a good software package that does all the balancing and tracking for you.

Be a Real Parent, Not a Super Parent

For some, parenting has become a job description rather than a role or relationship. Mention parenting and their mind goes to cooking, shopping, chauffeuring, sponsoring, music lessons, scouting, educational software, and SAT scores.

Yes, parenting involves all those things, but not at the same time and to the -nth degree. Parenting is more a way of loving and guiding than doing and spending. Don't let parenting become a burden rather than a joy.

Tune Out Kids' Routine Bellyachin'

Very few things can be as emotionally draining as hearing kids whine and complain; it can leave you feeling that you as a parent are somehow responsible to entertain or referee them. Lest you think it is only YOUR household in which children's emotional growth and future happiness is stunted, rest assured that the following comments can be heard in kitchens across America:

Why can't I?

But Dad/Mom said I could.

All the other kids' parents let them.

Don't you trust me?

Why does she/he get away with it and I don't?

Everybody else is going.

Nobody's parents make them do that anymore.

The list goes on. Filter these comments from your psyche, and do not let them produce guilt or defensiveness. As much as possible, explain your reasoning and then set your limits or state your decisions. Teach your kids to talk and reason without whining (listen only when the whine disappears). Encourage them to mediate their own petty disagreements (with incentives for both sides for early resolutions that do not involve you as "arbitrator.")

Delegate at Work, Home, and Play

To lighten your workload to what a reasonably productive person should be able to accomplish, do an audit on yourself: Could part or all of the task be delegated? These guidelines will help you with the basics of delegating:

Teach your child to be self-sufficient.

- Accept the fact that hard work and responsibility are actually good for a child.
- Allow children to do it their own way as long as they accomplish the result you want.
- Tell a child if you expect him or her to do things your way.

- Allow the child to make mistakes without overreacting.
- Set deadlines and standards for completion and take the time to enforce them.
- Consider dealing with complaints as part of raising a child.
- Give credit for a job well done.

Take Short Sabbaticals from Work and Family

When dealing with true burnout (in other words, an afternoon away won't do the trick), try to find other options to give yourself a few weeks or a few months to recover and regain your perspective.

Try setting up a job-sharing situation (like swapping child-care, grocery shopping, or chauffeur duties) with a friend for a week. If you need a sabbatical from an exhausting or stressful family situation (such as a seriously ill family member for whose care you have primary responsibility), try reassigning a few duties to various other family members for a short period of time. Or, hire a college student or elderly worker for some of the tasks. If you can't find someone else to take the heavy responsibilities, can you hire help for the less-vital tasks or let the routine tasks go undone for a few days or weeks?

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***Dianna Booher** works with organizations to increase their productivity and effectiveness through better oral, written, interpersonal, and cross-functional communication. She is a keynote speaker and the author of more than 40 books (22 on communication) including The Voice of Authority, Booher's Rules of Business Grammar, Speak with Confidence, and Communicate with Confidence. Dianna is CEO of **Booher Consultants**, a communication training firm offering programs in presentations skills, business writing, and interpersonal communication. Successful Meetings Magazine named her to its list of "21 Top Speakers for the 21st Century." Executive Excellence Publishing also named Dianna to its "Top 100 Thought Leaders" and "Top 100 Minds on Personal Development." www.booher.com or call 800.342.6621.*

For more tips on conflict resolution, see Communicate with Confidence: How to Say It Right the First Time and Every Time (McGraw-Hill) by Dianna Booher.